



## **MAT Stress Management Policy**

<b>Date Approved and Minuted</b>	<b>Trust Board</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> May 2026
<b>Date of Next Review</b>	<b>Trust Board</b>	May 2029

<b>Change Log</b>		
V1	10/04/2026	Draft for board approval

## 1. Purpose

The Trust recognises that work-related stress is both a health and safety issue and an HR issue and is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees by taking measures to identify and manage the causes of work-related stress to minimise stress and stress-related illness.

This policy provides a framework for:

- identifying and assessing sources of work-related stress
- implementing appropriate control measures
- supporting staff experiencing stress
- monitoring and reviewing stress risks across the Trust

This policy should be read alongside the Trust's:

- Health, safety and welfare policy
- Risk management policy
- Sickness absence policy
- Capability procedure
- Grievance policy
- Workload and wellbeing statement

## 2. Definition

The Trust adopts the definition of work-related stress used by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE):

*"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them."*

A certain amount of pressure is a normal part of most jobs, however, there is an important distinction between working under pressure and pressure becoming excessive and causing stress, which can be detrimental to health. We recognise that what triggers stress and the capacity to deal with stress varies from person to person.

Stress may be experienced as a result of the workplace, external factors or a combination of both. Workplace factors could include the nature of the employee's work, the volume of the work, working hours, environmental factors, changes such as a restructure or redundancy programme or bullying or harassment by colleagues or third parties.

## 3. Legal and organisational framework

This policy forms part of the Trust's overall health and safety management and HR systems.

There are 2 main pieces of health and safety law which cover work-related stress:

- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 – this puts a 'duty of care' on employers to protect their employees from the risk of stress at work
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 – this requires all employers to make a 'suitable and sufficient assessment' of the risks to the health and safety of their employees at work

The Trust and its schools will:

- ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments for work-related stress are in place
- ensure findings are recorded, actions are assigned, and risks are monitored and reviewed
- ensure that relevant findings and agreed actions are communicated appropriately to staff
- review risks regularly through established governance structures

Stress management will be integrated into:

- school-level health, safety and welfare arrangements
- Trust risk management processes where appropriate

#### **4. Roles and responsibilities**

Trust Board

- Ensure effective oversight of staff wellbeing and work-related stress management
- Receive assurance through existing reporting mechanisms

Chief Executive Officer / central team

- Monitor trends across schools (e.g. absence, surveys, cases)
- Ensure appropriate support and escalation where needed
- Ensure risk assessment training is available to headteachers and senior leaders

Local Governing Bodies (LGBs)

- Monitor staff wellbeing at school level
- Ensure stress risks are being identified and managed
- Receive relevant reports from headteachers

Headteachers

- Have overall responsibility for managing stress risks within their school
- Ensure:
  - appropriate risk assessments are undertaken where required
  - early signs of stress are identified
  - staff are supported appropriately
- Report significant concerns around staff wellbeing, absence trends, and stress-related concerns to the LGB

Local Health & Safety Governor

- Ensuring health & safety issues, including staff wellbeing and stress management is discussed at LGB

Managers (including heads and other senior leaders)

- Monitor workload, working patterns, and staff wellbeing
- Take early action where concerns arise
- Ensure staff are aware of support available

Employees

- Take reasonable care of their own health and wellbeing
- Raise concerns at an early stage
- Support colleagues and contribute to a positive working environment

#### **5. Identifying stress risks**

The Trust will use a range of mechanisms to identify potential sources of stress, including:

- staff workload and wellbeing surveys
- analysis of absence data
- feedback from LGBs

Trust schools will identify sources of stress through:

- informal staff discussions
  - absence data and return-to-work discussions
  - performance management and supervision
  - grievances and complaints
  - feedback from staff and trade union representatives
  - discussions within the LGB
- The Trust will have regard to the HSE Management Standards:
    - demands
    - control
    - support
    - relationships
    - role
    - change

Structured conversation tools (such as the HSE Talking Toolkit) may be used to support discussions. These tools are intended to help identify potential causes of stress and should form part of a wider approach to managing risk.

## **6. Assessing stress risks**

Stress risks will be assessed in a proportionate way. Appendix 1 provides guidance on identifying and assessing stress issues and providing support to staff.

### **6.1. General approach**

Day-to-day issues will normally be managed through:

- line management
- supervision
- wellbeing processes

A formal stress risk assessment is not required for isolated or short-term issues that can be resolved through normal management action.

### **6.2. Formal risk assessment**

A specific stress risk assessment may be undertaken where:

- concerns are persistent or significant
- there is a pattern affecting individuals or teams
- stress is contributing to absence or performance concerns
- existing actions have not resolved the issue

Where undertaken, stress risk assessments must:

- focus on the key issues identified
- involve appropriate consultation with staff
- record findings and agreed actions
- assign clear ownership
- be reviewed regularly

Where appropriate:

- Trust risk scoring (likelihood and impact) may be applied
- significant risks may be escalated by the school's LGB and reflected in the Trust risk register.

## **7. Managing and reducing stress**

Control measures will be tailored to the identified risks and may include:

Organisational measures

- workload management strategies (as set out in the Trust statement)
- limiting unnecessary data collection and meetings
- providing appropriate resources and systems

Management actions

- regular supervision and communication
- clear expectations and role clarity
- early intervention where concerns arise

Support mechanisms

- Employee Assistance Programme
- occupational health referral
- wellbeing support and adjustments

Where performance concerns arise, managers will:

- explore underlying causes, including stress
- consider appropriate support measures before formal action

## **8. Supporting individuals**

Where a member of staff is experiencing stress:

- concerns should be discussed at the earliest opportunity
- a supportive and confidential approach will be taken
- appropriate adjustments will be considered

This may include:

- temporary adjustments to duties or workload
- flexible working arrangements where possible
- referral to occupational health

Stress-related absence will be managed in accordance with the Trust's Sickness Absence Policy.

## **9. Relationships and workplace culture**

The Trust will not tolerate bullying, harassment or inappropriate behaviour. Please see the MAT Staff Code of Conduct, MAT Harassment & Bullying Policy and the MAT Grievance Policy.

## **10. Monitoring and review**

Where stress risks have been identified, the Trust and its schools will monitor these risks through existing processes. Including LGB and Trust Board oversight.

## **11. Record keeping**

Information in relation to the management of stress at a school will be kept to ensure an accurate record is available of what was discussed and actions taken for monitoring purposes

Records will be kept on the employee's personnel file or kept with the school's health & safety records. All records will be treated as confidential and kept in line with GDPR requirements.

## Further Guidance

- HSE Management Standards : <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>
- HSE Guidance on Stress and mental health at work: [Stress and mental health at work - HSE](#)
- HSE Talking Toolkit: [Talking Toolkit](#)

Sources:       HSE Stress Management Guidance  
                  RPA Stress Management Bulletin

For queries relating to health & safety guidance on stress management please contact the Head of Estates.

For support with specific stress risks/issues please contact the Trust CEO.

## **Appendix 1 – Identifying and Assessing Stress and Implementing Support**

### **Key principles**

Stress management in schools should be:

- proactive, not reactive
- conversation-led, not form-led
- proportionate to the level of risk

Formal risk assessments are not required for every issue, but must be used where risks are significant or persistent.

### **Common indicators of stress**

Signs that an individual is experiencing stress will vary between individuals. When considering whether behaviours are indicative of stress, line managers should consider whether the changes in an individual's behaviour are more than just a "one-off" incident.

Some common signs of stress are listed below (experiencing one or more of these is not necessarily an indication of stress):

- Persistent or recurrent moods, for example anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness, mood swings (being tearful or over sensitive).
- Physical effects, e.g., aches and pains (headaches, back ache, neck ache), raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders.
- Poor and/or changed behaviours for example, increased absence levels (including arriving late at work), difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, loss of motivation, making more errors (poor performance), double checking everything, covering up mistakes by lying, working long hours/not taking a break, changes to sleeping or eating habits, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs, poor attitude, behaviour and relationships with colleagues.
- Prolonged or extreme exposure to the possible symptoms of stress is associated with serious chronic diseases such as heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety, or depression.

### **Assessment**

Where concerns have been identified that are beyond the isolated or short-term issues addressed by standard management action, a formal risk assessment should be carried out using the form in Appendix 2 (whole school concern) or Appendix 3 (individual concern).

When completing a formal assessment:

- Keep it brief (1-2 pages)
- Ensure focus is on real issues, not theoretical risks
- Ensure the individuals responsible for actions are clearly identified
- Review regularly

### **Support**

When looking at support for individuals schools should use the risk assessment to identify causes and possible adjustments as well as agreeing practical support measures. It may be helpful to create a Wellness Action Plan (See Appendix 5) to identify triggers and early warning signs, agree support strategies and clarify the most appropriate way for managers to respond.

NOTE: The WAP may be used when a staff member is experiencing stress, returning from a stress-related absence or as part of ongoing wellbeing support.; it should NOT be used as a formal HR or performance management document.

In addition to considering school/person-specific options available to support staff, managers should consider referring staff to the support (e.g., telephone counselling and debt advice) available through the Employee Assistance Programme or whether an Occupational Health Referral would be appropriate.

### **When to escalate**

Headteachers should seek advice from the Trust CEO where:

- stress is leading to formal processes (grievance, capability)
- there is significant absence
- risks cannot be managed at school level
- there are wider organisational concerns



**Actions summary (for ease of monitoring)**

Action	Owner	Timescale	Status

**Staff consultation**

*(Summarise how staff have been consulted and any key feedback)*

**Review**

- Date of review:
- Have actions been completed?
- Have risks reduced?
- Are further actions required?

### Appendix 3 – Individual Risk Assessment

#### Individual Stress Risk Assessment

<b>School:</b>			
<b>Employee Name:</b>		<b>Line Manager:</b>	
<b>Employee job role:</b>			
<b>Reason for Assessment:</b>			
<b>Date:</b>		<b>Review Date:</b>	

#### Risk assessment

<b>Stress area (HSE)</b>	<b>What are the potential hazards and stressors for each category?</b>	<b>What control measures can be put in place?</b>	<b>Priority (H/M/L)</b>	<b>Action taken: by whom and date</b>
<b>Demands</b> - this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment				
<b>Control</b> – how much say the person has in the way they do their work				
<b>Support</b> - this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues				
<b>Relationships</b> – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and				

dealing with unacceptable behaviour				
<b>Role</b> - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles				
<b>Change</b> – how organisational change (large or small) is communicated within the organisation				

<b>Headteacher/line manager signature:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Employee signature (if completed by employee):</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

<b>Date of review</b>	<b>Outcome of review and follow up action</b>

<b>Headteacher/line manager signature:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Employee signature (if completed by employee):</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

## **Appendix 4 – Guidance/considerations for the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Form**

### ***1. What job does the individual do and at what level? Examples:***

For example: SLT, Teacher [Main scale / UPS], Teaching assistant, Office – front line, Office – back office, Site supervisor, Cleaner, Cook, Catering assistant, Invigilator, Manager – teaching or non-teaching, etc

### ***2: What are the potential hazards and stressors? Examples:***

#### Demands

- Long hours
- Unreasonable deadlines
- Parent expectations (*e.g. that they'll solve the problem*)
- Excessively busy periods
- Inadequate rest and holidays
- Inadequate staffing
- Inappropriately qualified for the job
- Skills not recognised – promotion prospects not fulfilled
- Boring or repetitive work
- Too little to do
- Employees experiencing excessive workloads
- Employees working under excessive pressure
- Inability to cope with key aspects of the role

#### The physical working environment

- Poor temperature control
- Noise
- Lack of facilities for rest/breaks
- Poor lighting or ventilation
- Badly placed or designed workstations
- The psychological working environment
- Threat of aggression or violence
- Disruptive, angry, or stressed children
- Angry or stressed parents/members of the public
- Difficult colleagues
- Verbal abuse
- Poor management practices

#### Control

- Not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work
- Rigid work patterns and breaks
- Fixed deadlines occurring in different parts of the year
- Lack of control over work
- Conflicting work demands

#### Support

- Lack of effective return to work system
- Non-compliance with sickness and absence management policy
- Lack of managerial support through emotionally demanding work
- Inadequate inductions

- Reaction to post disciplinary, grievance, capability, or suspension
- Lack of adequate training

#### Relationships

- Poor relationships with others
- Staff complaints or rising absence trends
- Perception of bullying or confrontational communications styles from others
- Bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- Lack of support or fear culture from management and co-workers

#### Role

- Lack clear lines of accountability and responsibility
- Lack of communication and consultation (both sides)
- Perception of a culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems
- Failure by the organisation to recognise success
- A culture that considers stress a sign of weakness
- Personal risk in relation to the role (e.g. money, lone working)

#### Change

- Fears about job security / grading
- Poor communication – uncertainty about what is happening
- Not enough time allowed to implement change
- Inexperience/fear of new technology
- Lack of skills for new tasks
- Not enough resource allocated for change process
- Other personal fears, relocation

### ***3: Is there a high, medium, or low risk of stress, and why?***

- Does the type of job in combination with the working environment and organisation result in a high, medium, or low risk?
- What does history/experience tell us?
- What are the worst problems?

### ***4: What control measures can be put in place?***

- Training for job
- Job organisation
- Rest and meal break arrangements
- Job rotation
- Good working environment
- Security measures such as alarms, or buddying
- Local policy defined and upheld
- Counselling (last resort as this is not preventive action)

### ***5: Priority and timescale*** Some suggested goals:

<b>High risk: Priority 1 (fix first)</b>	Initiate simple actions immediately, and devise a plan to review longer term other actions within 3 months.
<b>Medium risk: Priority 2 (fix after all priority 1 have been attended to)</b>	Systematically review and initiate actions within 12 months.
<b>Low risk: Priority 3 (fix last)</b>	Document the risk assessment and revisit after 12 months

## Appendix 5 – Wellness Action Plan Template

# Wellness Action Plan

### **What are your current and intended working arrangements?**

*(you might wish to highlight any flexibility you have agreed with your line manager/HR from the stress risk assessment, or from your occupational health report)*

### **Are there any characteristics of your individual working style that you would like to make your line manager or colleagues aware of?**

*(For example a preference for face to face conversations or digital communications when being allocated work including negotiation on deadlines before they are set, a need for adequate time to prepare prior to meetings or creative tasks, having access to a mentor/buddy for questions you might not want to contact your line manager about, having a written plan of work in place which can be reviewed and amended regularly, clear quality criteria for work outputs if you have a tendency to over-work a task, tendency to have particularly high or low energy in the morning or in the afternoon)*

### **What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?**

*(For example, taking an adequate lunch break away from your workspace, getting some exercise before or after work or in your lunch break, natural light at your workspace, opportunities to get to know colleagues.)*

**Are there any situations or behaviours that can trigger stress for you whilst working?**

*(For example, conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan, difficulties in contacting colleagues whilst they are working remotely)*

**What can you, your line manager/HR or colleagues put in place to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work and minimise these triggers?**

*(For example, regular feedback and catch-ups, flexible working patterns, explaining wider organisational developments)*

**Are there any situations or behaviours that can trigger stress for you whilst working?**

*(For example, conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan, difficulties in contacting colleagues whilst they are working remotely)*

**Are there any early warning signs that might be noticed by your manager or colleagues when you are starting to experience stress at work?**

**What actions would you like to be taken if any of these early warning signs of stress are noticed by your line manager/HR or colleagues?**

*(For example, talk to you discreetly about it, contact someone that you have asked to be contacted)*

**Is there any additional information you would like to share that would support you at work?**

**Employee name**

**Date completed**

**Completed by**